

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BUENOS 08479 201726Z

64

ACTION ARA-20

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 8479

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, AR

SUBJECT: FORMOSA PROVINCE INTERVENED

SUMMARY: NATIONAL LEGISLATURE HAS VOTED THE INTERVENTION OF FORMOSA PROVINCE AFTER INTERNAL PERONIST POWER STRUGGLE HAD LEFT PROVINCE IN CHAOTIC POLITICAL CONDITION. HOWEVER, INTERVENTION REPRESENTS PRECEDENT WITH INAUSPICIOUS IMPLICATIONS FOR CONCEPT OF FEDERALISM UNDER PERON'S GOVERNMENT.

1. AFTER LENGTHY, HEATED AND AT TIMES ACRIMONIOUSLY PARTISAN DEBATE, CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES NOVEMBER 19 PASSED ALREADY APPROVED SENATE VERSION OF BILL TO INTERVENE ALL BRANCHES OF FORMOSA PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT. MATTER HAS BEEN FRONT PAGE NEWS IN BUENOS AIRES FOR PAST SEVERAL DAYS. ALTHOUGH THERE HAVE BEEN SERIOUS POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN OTHER PROVINCES RECENTLY (I.E. BUENOS AIRES, CORDOBA AND MENDOZA), THIS IS FIRST INSTANCE SINCE MAY 25 ELECTIONS IN WHICH FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS INTERVENED A PROVINCE, IN ACCORDANCE WITH CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS.

2. ROOT OF PROBLEM WHICH BROUGHT ABOUT NATIONAL GOVERNMENT'S ACTION APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN PERSONAL, SOMEWHAT BYZANTINE POWER STRUGGLE BETWEEN PERONIST GOVERNOR ANTENOR GAUNA AND ELEMENTS OF THE FREJULI DOMINATED PROVINCIAL CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES WHICH PASSED RESOLUTIONS NOVEMBER 16 SUSPENDING GAUNA FROM HIS
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BUENOS 08479 201726Z

DUTIES, AND RECOMMENDING HIS IMPEACHMENT TO PROVINCIAL SENATE.

VICE-GOVERNOR AUSBERTO ORTIZ (WHO OSTENSIBLY REPRESENTS PERONIST LABOR WING) IMMEDIATELY ASSUMED CHARGE OF PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATION. GOVERNOR GAUNA, HOWEVER, REFUSED TO STEP ASIDE, AND PROVISIONAL POLICE AND OTHER LAW ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES WERE ORDERED NOT TO TAKE SIDES IN INTERNECINE DISPUTE, THEREBY CREATING WHAT PROPONENTS OF INTERVENTION TURNED A POWER VACUUM.

3. OPPONENTS OF INTERVENTION IN BOTH HOUSES OF NATIONAL CONGRESS INCLUDING UCR, APR AND PROVINCIAL GROUPINGS SUCH AS SENATOR LEOPOLDO BRAVO'S SAN JUAN BLC, AND THE SAPAG BROTHERS' NEUQUEN POPULAR MOVEMENT, ARGUED STRENUOUSLY THAT PROVINCIAL MACHINERY WAS AVAILABLE TO HANDLE PROBLEM, AND THAT INTERVENTION IN THIS CASE WAS DAMAGING TO THE PRINCIPLE OF PROVINCIAL AUTONOMY AND TO THE NOTION OF FEDERALISM GUARANTEED BY NATIONAL CONSTITUTION. SEVERAL OPPOSITION LEADERS ACCUSED GOVERNMENT OF STEAMROLLER TACTICS IN FORCING THE MEASURE THROUGH FREJULI DOMINATED CONGRESS.

4. COMMENT: CLEARLY IT IS NOT FORMOSA ITSELF BUT THE BROADER ISSUE INVOLVED WHICH HAS SPARKED TENSION HERE. THE PERONISTS HAVE LITTLE TO LOSE OR GAIN IN FORMOSA. GOVERNOR GAUNA WON OVER TWO-THIRDS OF THE VOTE MAY 25, AND A FREJULI CANDIDATE WILL SURELY PREVAIL IF THE INTERVENTOR CALLS A SPECIAL GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION. FOR THE PERONISTS, INTERVENTION IN FORMOSA APPEARS LITTLE MORE THAN AN UNPLEASANT BUT NECESSARY HOUSEKEEPING CHORE IN A PROVINCE IN WHICH VERTICALITY HAS SOMEHOW GONE ASTRAY. EVEN THE LEFT-RIGHT SPLIT WITHIN THE PARTY DOES NOT SEEM TO BE AT ISSUE IN FORMOSA, ALTHOUGH LABOR ORIENTED ORTIZ HAS ALREADY MOVED TO DESIGNATE LABOR SECTOR LEADERS TO INFLUENTIAL POSITIONS IN PROVINCE. NONETHELESS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO BE CERTAIN AT THIS JUNCTURE WHICH OF THE SQUABBLING FORMOSA FACTIONS PERON WILL ULTIMATELY SUPPORT.

5. THE PERONIST DAILY "MAYORIA" EDITORIALIZED NOVEMBER 18 THAT THIS KIND OF CONFLICT WITHIN PROVINCIAL ADMINISTRATIONS SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISING IN VIEW OF THE SHORT TIME THE JUSTIALISTA PARTY HAD TO ORGANIZE AFTER 17 YEARS OF NEARLY COMPLETE PROSCRIPTION PRIOR TO MAY 25. THIS OVERLY SUDDEN ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORT LED TO ELECTORAL ALLIANCES BETWEEN

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PAGE 03 BUENOS 08479 201726Z

"IRRECONCIABLE FACTIONS" WHICH COULD NOT BE AVOIDED AT THE TIME. THE EDITORIAL IMPLIED THAT SIMILAR SITUATIONS MIGHT COME TO THE SURFACE IN OTHER PROVINCES. IT IS PRECISELY THIS LATTER POSSIBILITY WHICH SEEMED MOST TO TROUBLE OPPOSITION PARTIES IN THE CONGRESS WHO, PERHAPS WITH SAME REASON, VIEWED THE INTERVENTION OF FORMOSA AS AN INAUSPICIOUS PRECEDENT YET FELT THEMSELVES ENTIRELY SMOTHERED BY THE FREJULI'S ENORMOUS MAJORITIES IN BOTH

HOUSES OF CONGRESS. THE FREJULI HAS SOUGHT
CONSENSUS AND COMPROMISE ON MOST ISSUES WHICH HAVE ARISEN
SINCE MAY 25, IN KEEPING WITH THE THEME OF THE HORA DEL
PUEBLO. HOWEVER, THE INTERVENTION OF FORMOSA PROVINCE
SUGGESTS THAT PERON AND THE PERONIST LEGISLATIVE LEADER-
SHIP ARE NOT DISPOSED TO BARGAIN ON THSE KINDS OF MATTERS.
WHILE OPPOSITION PARTIES MAY HAVE SEEN THE ISSUE AS THE
PRESERVATION OF FEDERALISM, THE PERONISTS SAW IT AS AN
INTRAPARTY POLITICAL PROBLEM, AND LATTER HAD THE VOTES TO
IMPOSE THEIR WILL.

6. EMBASSY WILL REPORT FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS IN THIS MATTER
IF AND AS THEY BEAR ON NATIONAL POLITICAL SCENE.
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